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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000338

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PM](#)

SUBJECT: PANAMA: FINAL POLL RESULTS: MARTINELLI HOLDING  
STRONG

Classified By: Amb. Barbara J. Stephenson for reason 1.4(b)

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Summary  
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¶1. (U) With Panama's May 3 elections just nine days away, Alliance for Change opposition presidential candidate Ricardo Martinelli holds a twelve to sixteen point lead over Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) candidate Balbina Herrera, according to the final presidential polling data from Dichter and Neira, Unimer and Ipsos. Despite indications early this month that Herrera might have been closing the gap with Martinelli's lead, the closing numbers confirm a pattern that has held for several weeks: Martinelli continues to enjoy a double digit lead and roughly 50 percent of voter preference.

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Herrera Not Closing the Gap  
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¶2. (U) Since the last week in February, Martinelli has maintained between 49 and 52 percent of voter preference in Dichter and Neira's presidential poll, and Herrera has held steady between 34 and 37 percent. These numbers were within the poll's roughly 3 point margin of error, indicating that voters had not moved significantly in either direction for the last six weeks. In its final survey, Dichter and Neira forced voters to choose between candidates in a voting simulation and eliminated spoiled and blank ballots. The result was a last minute surge for both candidates, with Martinelli up four points, topping off with an impressive 55 percent of voter preference and Herrera up five points, closing the polls at 41 percent. According to Dichter and Neira, Martinelli continues to firmly hold a roughly 15 point lead.

¶3. (U) In a poll question from IPSOS earlier this month involving a mock vote, Herrera initially gained two points from early March, moving from 33 to 35 percent of voter preference, while Martinelli lost four points, slipping from 50 to 46 percent. This lowered Martinelli's lead to only nine points where he had previously enjoyed a 17 point advantage. Martinelli closed the gap in the latest Ipsos poll, however, bringing his numbers back up to 51 percent in the mock vote question while Herrera held at 35 percent. When asked in the same poll who they would vote for if the elections were held this Sunday, 49 percent of respondents indicated Martinelli, while only 33 percent selected Herrera. Either way the question was presented, voters gave Martinelli a 16 point lead over Herrera in Ipsos's final poll and Herrera experienced no last minute rally.

14. (U) Unimer was somewhat of an outlier, continuing in its final poll to show Herrera closing the gap somewhat on Martinelli's lead. According to the Unimer poll, Herrera trailed behind Martinelli by seventeen points in early March. The latest numbers cut Martinelli's lead to 11.9 points, indicating that Herrera has edged increasingly upward while Martinelli has held firm. According to Unimer, Martinelli now holds 50.2 percent of voter preference and Herrera 38.3 percent.

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Public Perception  
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15. (U) According to the Unimer poll, 40.9 percent of respondents feel that the PRD is the better organized party, with just 33.6 percent finding CD to be more organized. Organizational skills aside, an overwhelming 57.3 percent of respondents think that Martinelli will be the next president of Panama; only 22.9 percent think that Herrera will win the election. Indeed, Herrera is the most rejected candidate in the Unimer poll, with 40.9 percent of respondents saying they will not vote for her and only 27.2 percent of respondents rejecting Martinelli out of hand. A similar question asked in the Ipsos poll yielded yet more discouraging news for Herrera, with 41 percent of respondents indicating they would never vote for her and only 31 percent of voters indicating that they would never vote for Martinelli.

16. (U) Panama's La Estrella newspaper reported on April 23 that both political analysts and polling firms tended to

agree that the numbers have been firm since February and were not now likely to change significantly. According to the pundits, any last minute arguments of a technical draw between the two candidates would be unrealistic.

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COMMENT  
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17. (SBU) Martinelli is likely to be the first president elected in Panama since the 1989 restoration of democracy to secure more than 50 percent support at the ballot box. Furthermore, many analysts and political leaders believe Martinelli's four party coalition will take control of the National Assembly as well as make sufficient in-roads at the local level in mayoral and city council races. Indeed, for the first time in this campaign, Martinelli's candidate for mayor of Panama City, Bosco Vallarino, is leading his PRD opponent, Bobby Valasquez, Jr., by four points. A Martinelli victory will have a seismic effect on Panamanian politics. The strength of the Martinelli seismic event will be measured on the Panamanian political Richter scale in terms of the numbers of National Assembly deputies, mayors and city councilmen that Martinelli's alliance puts into office.

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Technical Data  
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18. (U) Dichter and Neira conducted 1,200 interviews of men and women over the age of 18 who are residents of Panama. The poll was conducted nationally, including the indigenous people's autonomous regions (comarcas) of the Ngobe Bugle and Madungandi but excluding the remote and difficult to reach Darien Province. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in individuals' homes from Saturday, April 18 to Sunday, April 19. Sampling was multi-staged. The first stage distributed the total sample according to population by province as well as rural and urban precincts, and in the second stage blocks were randomly selected and homes were first randomly and then systematically selected. The margin of error for the poll was assessed at +/- 3.5 percent in Panama City and +/- 2.9 percent in other areas with an overall confidence level of 95 percent. Unimer conducted 1,600 face to face interviews of residents of Panama between the ages of 18 and 75 at all

economic levels on Wednesday, April 15 to Friday, April 17. The poll was conducted nationally in urban and semiurban zones except in the remote and difficult to reach Darien Province and indigenous people's autonomous regions (comarcas). The margin of error was 2.5 percent with a confidence level of 95 percent. Ipsos interviewed 3,014 residents of Panama over the age of 18 on Thursday, April 16 to Saturday, April 19 in their homes. Interviews took place in rural and urban areas except in the remote and difficult to reach Darien Province and indigenous people's autonomous regions (comarcas). The margin of error was +/- 2 percent in some districts and +/- 4 percent in others, with a confidence level of 95 percent.

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